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AUTHOR Stansell, John C.; Robeck, Carol P.
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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to address the question of how an undergraduate reading specialization program for preservice teachers affected the theoretical orientation of students enrolled in it. The program in question required students to complete seven courses. For purposes of the study, the coursework was divided into three components: an introductory section of four courses concerning reading instruction in the elementary school, a field based practicum course, and a choice of two of the following: a secondary school reading course, a course on the use of children's literature in reading instruction, and a course on the nature and development of oral and written language. Some 300 students completed the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) at various times during the program. The TORP consists of 28 propositions about reading instruction--ten reflecting a phonics orientation, ten a skills orientation, and eight a whole language orientation. Tentative results showed the following: introductory courses tended to move students from a phonics to a skills orientation; language and reading courses tended to move students toward a whole language orientation; and the orientation of students completing the program tended to remain within the range for a skills orientation unless they had the language and reading course in which case their orientation shifted toward a whole language approach. (FL)

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John C. Stansell
Assistant Professor
Department of Educational
Curriculum and Instruction
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

Carol P. Robeck
Lecturer
Department of Educational
Curriculum and Instruction
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas 77843

The Development of Theoretical Orientation to Reading Among Preservice Teachers

John C. Stansell
Texas A&M University

Carol P. Robeck
Texas A&M University

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of professional training, including campus-based coursework and field practicum experiences, upon the orientations of students in an undergraduate reading specialization program.

Rationale

The Concept of Theoretical Orientation

In a recent paper, Harste and Burke (1977) hypothesize that "both the teaching and the learning of reading are theoretically based" (p. 32). Both teachers and students behave according to stable and consistent assumptions about the nature of the reading process and its acquisition.

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Harste and Burke identified three theoretical orientations which they labelled phonics, skills, and whole language. These three differ on the dimension of the size of the language unit seen as critical in reading and learning to read. In a phonics orientation letter-sound (graphophonemic) relationships are critical in the instructional program. A skills orientation views words as critical units and focuses attention upon word recognition and identification techniques. A whole language orientation entails seeing sentences, paragraphs, and discourses as critical units and focuses attention on intrasentence and intersentence syntax and semantics.

As DeFord (1978) has pointed out, these orientations also differ on another important dimension. DeFord described the phonics and skills orientations as arising from a mechanistic theory model (Steiner, 1977) wherein phenomena to be understood are seen as analogous to machines, with each part having a fixed, unalterable function and the whole being the sum of its parts. In such a model, understanding a phenomena would be possible through separate examination of the several parts. Phonics and skills orientations reflect this model through a pedogogical focus upon separate and somewhat isolated examination of "parts" of written language - letters and words (Burke, 1972; McCracken & Walcutt, 1963; Robinson, Monroe, & Artley, 1962).

On the other hand, a whole-language orientation arises from an organismic theory model (Steiner, 1977) wherein phenomena are viewed as analogous to organisms. An understanding of phenomena from this perspective involves the notion that parts have alterable functions and

are interactive and interdependent in maintaining the function of the whole. A whole language orientation reflects this model through a pedagogical focus upon the interactive and interdependent nature of cue systems in written language (Aaron, I.E., Artley, A.S., Goodman, K.S., Huck, C.S., Jenkins, W.A., Manning, J.C., Monroe, M., Pyle, W.J., Robinson, H.M., Schiller, A., Smith, M.B., Sullivan, L.M., Weintraub, S., & Wepman, J.M., 1971; Burke, 1972; Martin & Brogan, 1972; Watson, 1973). Such a focus is most commonly manifested by keeping the reader involved with whole, non-fractionated text and avoiding treatment of aspects of features of written language in isolation.

The Impact of the Teacher's Orientation

Harste and Burke (1977) presented field data to support their hypothesis about theoretical orientation which further suggested that the orientations of many students reflect the orientation of their teacher. Research which has involved the impact of instructional approaches upon reading behavior (Andrews, 1976; Barr, 1975; Biemiller, 1970; DeLawter, 1970; Norton, 1977, Stansell, Harste & DeSanti, 1978) indicates that reading behaviors are to a considerable degree artifacts of instruction. Since the instructional approaches which teachers use are likely to be reflective of their theoretical orientations, it may be argued that the theoretical orientations held by teachers constitute a major variable in the determination of reading behaviors among learners. Research investigations of the development of theoretical orientations among teacher trainers seem clearly warranted, as do investigations of how such orientations may change.

Questions Guiding the Study

This study was undertaken to address the question of how an undergraduate reading specialization program affects the theoretical orientations of students enrolled in it. Within this general framework, more specific questions include:

1. What is the nature of students' theoretical orientations at the beginning of the program?
2. What are the effects of various aspects of the program upon students' orientations?
3. What is the nature of students' theoretical orientations at the end of the program?

The questions above represent the first to be addressed in the course of a fairly extensive research project that also will involve, at a later point, investigations of the effects of student teaching and of the initial years of professional experience.

Method

Organization of Program

The program in question requires students to complete seven courses which collectively represent eighteen semester hours of credit. For the purposes of this study, the program of coursework was divided into three components, or sections. The three components and a brief description of the courses included in them are given in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

The division of the program into these three components was not entirely arbitrary. Including the first four courses in Component 1

TABLE 1

Components of Program

Component	Description
I.	a. Two courses taken concurrently which are designed to introduce students to basic concepts and terms concerning reading instruction in the primary and intermediate grades.
	b. A course on the methods, approaches, and materials of reading instruction.
	c. A course on assessment procedures used in reading instruction.
II.	A field-based practicum course which requires the student to work with children in an instructional capacity for one hour per day over a twelve-week period.
III.	Students may select any two of the following three courses, referred to as 400-level courses.
	a. A secondary reading course, which is designed for those students interested in teaching in the upper elementary, middle school, or junior high grades, and which treats content area reading from the perspective of the classroom content area teacher.
	b. A course on the use of children's literature in teaching reading.
	c. A course on the nature and development of oral and written language which considers reading as a language process. This course is later referred to as 460.

Note: The study involved four data collection points which relate to these components:
1. Beginning of Component I;
2. Completion of Component I;
3. Completion of Component II;
4. Completion of Component III.

was expected to enable the effects of basic instruction in the teaching of reading to be discernible. The content of these four courses represents the type of instruction included in a regular three-semester-hour course on "Reading in the Elementary Grades." Because this basic instruction is spread over four courses representing ten semester hours, the content is much more extensive and thorough than is possible with one three-semester-hour course. The inclusion of the practicum course alone in Component 2 reflects an intuitive judgment that field experiences may tend to produce in students a tendency to reflect the orientations of those practicing teachers with whom they have worked; it was therefore decided to see what, if any, effects could be attributed to this course alone. Also, the effects of the total program were of interest. Therefore, Component 3 was included in order to determine the orientations of students exiting the program and to permit comparisons of the orientations of entering students, those progressing through the program, and those completing the program.

Instrument

The instrument, the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), was developed and validated by DeFord (1978). The TORP consists of 28 propositions about reading instruction, and requires respondents to indicate agreement or disagreement with each proposition on a five-point Likert scale. Ten of the propositions reflect a phonics orientation, ten reflect a skills orientation, and eight reflect a whole language orientation. Scores on the TORP may range from 28-140. Subjects scoring at the low end of this range (28-65)

reflect a phonics orientation and those whose scores are at the upper end of this range (110-140) reflect a whole language orientation. Scores in the middle of the range (65-110) reflect a skills orientation.

Data Collection

Data collection began at the beginning of the Spring semester 1979. Since that time, data have been collected from all students at each of the four points in the course sequence previously described in Table 1 (N=300). Students begin the reading specialization program as sophomores or first semester juniors, and are usually seniors at the time of completion. Since there has not been enough time for those students who began their reading specialization in the Spring of 1979 to finish all courses, a cross-sectional sample was used in order to obtain data from each of the program components.

Data Analysis and Discussion

It was necessary to deal with the fact that at identified data collection points, students did not all have the same courses completed. For example, some of the students completing Component 1 had completed additional courses from other components. Therefore, for the purpose of analysis, categories were devised (see Table 2) which reflect the actual courses students had taken at the various data collection points.

Insert Table 2 here

The departures from the regular course sequence that were observed among students at the various data collection points were, in a sense, advantageous; the categorization scheme that it led to

TABLE 2

Categories for Comparison*

Category	Description
1	Beginning reading courses (i.e., newly enrolled in the two initial courses of Component I)
2	Finished first four courses (i.e., finished Component I)
3	Finished first four courses and 460, and/or one other 400-level course
4	Finished first four courses and one or more 400-level course other than 460.
5	Finished first four courses, then practicum and one 400-level course (not 460) concurrently
6	Finished first four courses, then practicum and 460 concurrently
7	Finished first four courses and practicum
8	Finished all courses, did not take 460
9	Finished all courses, including 460

*These categories are the categories among which comparisons are made and which reflect actual program coursework completed at the points of data collection.

permitted a closer and clearer examination of the effects of some specific courses than would have been possible if these courses were in every case embedded within their respective components.

The comparisons made among the TORP scores in various categories must be reported with varying degrees of confidence. Since this is a long-term study now in its initial stages, the sample sizes in various categories vary considerably, with those in the latter categories tending to be smaller than those in the first two. However, even at this early stage, interesting and important findings concerning the orientations of beginning students and the effects of some course components and individual courses have resulted from the analysis.

The data were analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics (Table 3) as well as T-tests (Table 4). Inferences that may be drawn from inspection of category means are supported by T-tests comparing means of several pairs of categories. As can be seen from Tables 3 and 4 scores of beginning students (category 1) are significantly different from those who have finished the first four foundation courses (category 2), from those who have finished the first four courses and the language and reading course, and from those who have finished the first four courses and one of the other 400 level courses. The T-tests also indicate that the scores of students who have finished the first four courses (category 2) are significantly different from those who have finished either the language and reading course (category 3) or one of the other 400 level courses (category 4). However, scores of students in categories 3 and 4 are not significantly different. These results suggest that

students enter the program with a rather strong phonics orientation and that substantial change ensues as a result of their initial coursework. The results also suggest that the 400 level courses produce changes in orientation beyond those of the first four foundation courses.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 here

Statistically and practically, the practicum had no effect on the students' orientation. Several before and after practicum comparisons were made and with one exception there was a slight drop in mean scores after the practicum. The one exception was between category 2 ($\bar{X}$=77.82) and category 7 ($\bar{X}$=78.85). These categories include students who are completing the program as originally planned and have not had any 400 level courses. However, in each of the comparisons involving categories of students who have stepped out of the planned sequence and have taken a 400 level course either before or with the practicum, the means are slightly lower after the practicum. For example, the mean in category 3 ($\bar{X}$=92.25) and category 4 ($\bar{X}$=86.18) is slightly higher than the mean in category 6 ($\bar{X}$=84.63).

Finally, it was noted that the mean for students completing the program with the language and reading course (category 9, $\bar{X}$=101.71) was significantly higher than the mean for students who have completed the program without the language and reading course (category 8, $\bar{X}$=80.50). These differences in means between categories 8 and 9 suggest that component 3 makes a difference only if the language and reading course has been taken.

The mean for students in category 9 was significantly higher than the mean for students in any other category with the possible exception of category 3. Furthermore, the maximum score in category 9 was higher

TABLE 3

Descriptive Data For Categories of Program Components

Categories	N	Mean TORP Score	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Min. Score	Max. Score
2, 3, 4	81	82.52	13.13	1.46	48	128
6, 7	21	81.05	9.32	2.03	64	100
8, 9	21	97.67	17.08	3.73	68	133
1	54	57.15	7.59	1.03	43	79
2	50	77.82	9.88	1.39	48	98
3	20	92.25	15.17	3.39	66	128
4	11	86.18	12.24	3.69	57	100
6	8	84.63	8.93	3.16	76	100
7	13	78.85	9.20	2.55	64	94
8	4	80.50	13.53	6.76	68	95
9	17	101.71	15.47	3.75	74	133

*1 = Entering program; 2 = Finished first 4 courses; 3 = Finished first 4 courses and 460; 4 = Finished first 4 courses and one 400-level course not 460; 6 = Finished first 4 courses, then practicum and 460 concurrently; 7 = Finished first 4 courses, then practicum; 8 = Finished all courses not including 460; 9 = Finished all courses including 460.

TABLE 4

Comparisons Among Categories

Comparison*	T	P>T	= Variance F	P>F
2, 3, 4-6, 7	.48	.63	1.98	.09
2, 3, 4-8, 9	4.41	.0001	1.69	.11
6, 7-8. 9	3.91	.0005	3.35	.001
1-2	-12.01	.0001	1.70	.06
1-3	- 9.90	.0001	3.99	.0001
1-4	- 7.58	.0001	2.60	.02
2-3	- 3.93	.0006	2.36	.02
2-4	- 2.43	.02	1.53	.31
3-4	1.14	.27	1.54	.49
2-7	.34	.74	1.15	.83
4-7	1.67	.11	1.77	.35
3-6	1.32	.20	2.89	.16
6-9	- 2.89	.001	3.00	.15
7-8	- .28	.78	2.16	.29
7-9	- 4.72	.0001	2.83	.07
3-9	- 1.87	.07	1.04	.93
2-8	- .51	.61	1.87	.29
2-9	5.97	.0001	2.45	.02
4-8	.73	.49	1.22	.70
4-9	- 2.80	.009	1.60	.46

*1 = Entering program; 2 = Finished first 4 courses; 3 = Finished first 4 courses and 460; 4 = Finished first 4 courses and one 400 level course not 460; 6 = Finished first 4 courses, then practicum and 460 concurrently; 7 = Finished first 4 courses and practicum; 8 = Finished all courses not including 460; 9 = Finished all courses including 460.

than the maximum score in the other categories, and with the exception of category 6 (which also includes the language and reading course) the minimum score was higher than the minimum score in the other categories. The mean of categories 3, 6, and 9 which include the language and reading course was higher than the mean of the other categories and categories 3, 6, and 9 each had maximum scores that fell well within the range for a whole language orientation.

Categories 3 and 9 had greater ranges in scores than any of the other categories while Category 6 had the smallest range. These extreme ranges have prompted two conjectures concerning the influence of the language and reading course which presents a strong argument for a whole language orientation, more so than any of the other courses. First, the low scores of students entering the program together with the extreme ranges in categories 3 and 9 suggest to the investigators that in the language and reading course, students who enter the program with a phonics orientation encounter concepts that are not compatible with their orientations and the acceptance of these ideas may be related to a number of factors including personality variables such as dogmatism or flexibility. Second, the lower maximum score in Category 6 suggests a possible counter influence to the language and reading courses arising from the practicum experience. The fact that category 9 has the highest mean and the greatest maximum score has raised the question of when in the course sequence the language and reading course has the greatest impact. At the present time it is not possible to determine whether the students in Category 9 took the language and reading course before, with,

or after the practicum. Consequently, in future research, Category 9 will have to be divided into subcategories (students who took the language and reading course before the practicum, concurrently with the practicum, or after the practicum) in order to draw any conclusive answers concerning the influence of this course. The subdivisions will also help test the conjecture that the practicum has a counter influence.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the assumption that teachers do have a consistent, stable theoretical rationale which underlies and generates teaching behaviors, this study represents an effort to apply DeFord's TORP in the area of reading teacher education. Thus far, results from this investigation have been based on data collected from a cross-sectional sample of students who are at different stages in the reading specialization course sequence. Tentative conclusions drawn from this initial data are:

1. Introductory core courses tend to move students from a phonics orientation to a skills orientation.
2. The language and reading course tends to move students' toward a whole language orientation. If this course is taken concurrently with the practicum, the practicum experience may tend to counter its influence, although the practicum alone has no discernible impact.
3. The orientation of students completing the program tends to remain within the range for a skills orientation unless they have had the language and reading course in which case their

scores tend to shift toward a more whole-language approach.

The data demonstrate the impact of the undergraduate reading specialization program as well as the impact of specific courses and components within the program. However, an important question concerning this impact and that of teacher education in general involves the influence of the student teaching experience and the first few years of teaching. It is grat'fying to know that an influence on orientation has occurred as a result of course offerings; however, whether that influence is maintained once students are out of the college setting is an equally important question which research should address.

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